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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003679

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: NAJAF SADRISTS DISORGANIZED BUT STILL HAVE  
INFLUENCE

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Security in Najaf Province remains stable, but recent IED attacks suggest that the province's Sadrist militants are still active, albeit weakened. In a series of meetings with Senior Advisor Gordon Gray on November 17-18, local Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), politicians, and tribal sheikhs dismissed the Sadrists as a political force and expressed confidence in their ability to control Sadrist activity. BG Karim, the Badr-affiliated provincial police chief, argued that the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) leadership in Najaf -- not the Baghdad branch -- still calls the shots in Muqtada al-Sadr's absence. Key provincial leaders such as Governor Abu Assad Gelal (ISCI) and Sheikh Fayed al-Shimmeri (Da'wa) dismissed the Sadrist leadership, saying they were too disorganized, fractured and indecisive to be appropriate negotiating partners for any potential reconciliation negotiations with the Iraqi Government. End summary.

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Keeping The Peace  
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¶2. (C) Najaf's improving security situation has been challenged recently by a series of incidents in the rural southeastern parts of the province, where Sadrist militants are still active. On November 9, a Coalition Forces convoy hit an IED three kilometers from the Provincial Reconstruction Team, causing injuries and potentially delaying the start of operations at nearby Najaf International Airport. (Note: The airport went ahead with its first outbound international flight, a hajj flight to Jeddah, on November 18. End note.) In a meeting with Border Guard General MG Ghazali and sheikhs representing the al-Yasir, al-Ibrahim, and al-Fareeq tribes, Ghazali claimed that the ISF have strong relationships with tribesmen in the troubled areas, and have the situation under control. Sheikh Shafeq al-Yasiri revealed that he is the leader of the Southeastern branch of the province's Security Council (SC). He said that his SC works informally within each tribe to discourage militants, and turns in to the ISF key details about tribe member militants when they fail to heed warnings to cease and desist. (Note: In August, these same tribal sheikhs threatened armed action against the ISCI-led provincial government due to various grievances. End note.)

¶3. (C) Police Chief BG Karim emphasized that security in the key urban centers had improved to the point where Sadrists were invisible in Najaf and inactive in Kufah. He touted his initiative to replace soldiers at the checkpoints with cameras, and praised the improved performance of his SWAT team in targeting militants. Karim offered multiple ways in which the U.S. could help support his continued efforts to upgrade security, including the need for a forensics lab and an "information center" to infiltrate militias. Karim was nevertheless proud of how much additional training and

equipment had improved police performance and weakened the Sadrists. As evidence, he contrasted the previous week's anniversary of the death of Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, commemorated by approximately 1,000 young, unarmed marchers under heavy police presence, with the same event two years earlier, which featured 20,000 armed men who marched in front of a police force that often was not carrying weapons for fear of becoming a target.

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Who Runs OMS in Najaf?  
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¶4. (C) While boasting about his success against the Sadrists, Karim emphasized that OMS/Najaf still poses a threat, opposes the SOFA, and remains the decision-making nexus for most Sadrists in Muqtada's absence. He advised that the power of Sadrism leaders should be viewed in inverse proportion to their public profile. To illustrate his point, Karim described a Sadrism iftar dinner he attended this September, in which the people least likely to talk were in his opinion the most influential. He dismissed the power of OMS spokesmen in Baghdad such as Salah al-Obeidi and identified Imam Jabar al-Khafaji, Ahmed Shebani, and Abu Hassan al-Sarkhiy (who is just across the Euphrates in Shamiyah, Diwaniyah Province) as main local OMS leaders. Karim viewed Khafaji as particularly important, saying that "75 percent of the execution orders have come from him," including the execution of Sadrism cleric Sahib al-Ameri in late 2006. He believes that Khafaji has had and continues to have influence on Muqtada's decision-making.

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Sadrism Negotiating Partners?  
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¶5. (C) While other contacts were less specific in their assessment, local opinion unanimously held that Sadrists were too fractured and disorganized to be effectively reconciled and brought into the political process. Sheikh Fayed, a former Provincial Council Chairman with ISCI who has recently switched to Da'wa, noted that Sadrists had recently contacted the Maliki government to discuss reconciliation. Fayed said that this is not unusual, in the sense that individual Sadrists often communicate with his party to provide unspoken support on issues in Parliament. He was not optimistic about broader reconciliation negotiations, however, because he believes it is not possible to negotiate with Sadrists as a bloc, either in Najaf or Baghdad.

¶6. (C) Outgoing ISCI Governor Abu Gelal acknowledged that the Sadrists needed to be brought into the political process (and advised sternly that ISCI had attempted to do so years earlier when Maliki and Ibrahim Jaafari were opposed to the idea), but believed the Sadrists offered no appropriate negotiating partner. In a blanket dismissal of Muqtada specifically and negotiations with Sadrists generally, Gelal quipped: "Imam Ali said, "when I discuss with a wise man, I always win. When I discuss with an unwise man, I always lose."  
CROCKER